

Submitter: Margaret Hennessy

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Business and Labor

Measure: HB4002

Dear Chair Holvey and Members of the House Business and Labor Committee,

I am writing to you today in support of farmworker overtime. Farmworkers should receive overtime pay after 40 hours in a workweek at one and one-half times the employee's regular rate of pay.

If there was ever any doubt that farmworkers were "essential workers" and deserving of the highest respect and gratitude for their long hours harvesting and packing the food we eat, those doubts had to vanish during the last couple of years. While so many of us stayed safely at home for months, so as not to get infected during the pandemic, innumerable farmworkers across the country continued their work. Most people continued to eat the fruits and vegetables farmworkers continued to pick and pack for our kitchens. We all saw photos of farmworkers out in the fields, still working, while wildfires threatened homes and the smoke made breathing difficult. Most of us stayed indoors, to protect our lungs and our eyes. Many farmworkers continued their labors, because their incomes are, for some, so minimal that they have to work as many hours as their employers permit or require. Yet, no matter how many hours they work each day, they are not legally entitled to overtime. Why do these workers not deserve equal treatment under our employment laws? The original justification for exempting farmworkers from overtime requirements was steeped in racism. Can't we begin to erase these vestiges of racism and recognize that farmworkers are indeed essential workers and deserve the same rights and respect other workers deserve?

It is time for Oregon to join several other states in ending this racist practice of excluding agricultural workers from overtime pay and recognize the significance of their work in all of our daily lives.

I urge you to pass farmworker overtime in the 2022 Legislative Session to ensure farmworkers in Oregon are paid fairly for their skilled and essential labor.

Sincerely,
margaret hennessy